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Paper Read Before the Lebanon County Historical Society, June 16, 1905.

By J. H. REDSECKER, Ph. M.,
Lebanon, Pa.

VOL. III. No. 6.

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The repeal of the Missouri Compromise was like lifting the lid of Pandora's box. A number of evils were permitted to escape, chief of which was the right of extending slavery into the northwestern territories above 36.30 which had been prohibited from the time of the enactment of the Missouri Compromise, thirty years before, and by force and fraud, on the part of the slaveholding element, establish it there as a permanent institution. This action aroused the North to the aggressiveness of the slaveholding States, brought on finally the "irrepressible conflict" and, eventually, the war of the Rebellion, which only terminated after four years of relentless and cruel war, costing millions of treasure and terrible sacrifice, suffering and sorrow.

Before this repeal the nation was divided into two great political parties, both of which not only tolerated, but defended slavery—the Democratic and Whig parties. The latter, no longer able to grapple with the new problems confronting the country, was fast disintegrating, when a new party sprang into existence, "like Minerva from the brain of Jove," almost fully equipped, and ready to take up the new issues which had arisen. The 33rd Congress, which terminated its existence in March, 1855, does not contain the name of a single Republican on its roster, while the succeeding Congress, which met in December of the same year, has upon its rolls no less than fifteen Republicans in the Senate and one hundred and eight members in the House, exceeding the Democrats in the House by 25. Nathaniel P. Banks, of Massachusetts, a Republican, after a prolonged and exciting contest, was elected speaker

with the aid of the Americans One year later, in 1856, the Republican party with but one issue—opposition to the extension of human slavery, had become a national organization and with Gen. John C. Fremont, was contesting for the Presidency of the United States, its campaign cry being "Free Soil, Free Press, Free Men and Fremont." Fortunately for the country and the party, Fremont was unsuccessful, as war would have resulted and it is doubtful whether he would have been of the temperament to have conducted it to a successful issue. James Buchanan was elected, the Democratic party was successful and war was averted for the time being.

Then followed four years of border warfare in Kansas as the result of the attempt of the slave State men to force a pro-slavery constitution on the territory; the admission of Kansas as a free state, and the final triumph of the anti-slavery party.

The interval between the election of Mr. Buchanan and the campaign of 1860 was a probationary period for the Republican party. While it had not departed from its opposition to the extension of slavery, it had broadened greatly, so that when the presidential struggle of 1860 came, it had other issues as well. Abraham Lincoln was its nominee for the Presidency, while the Democracy was hopelessly divided between John C. Breckenridge and Stephen A. Douglass, with some minor parties.

The campaign of 1860 was the most brilliant of any that had preceded it, not excepting that of 1840, when political excitement ran high, and clubs traveled hundreds of miles in wagons with log cabins and hard cider; when

"Tippecanoe and Tyler, too,"

was echoed and re-echoed from thousands of throats, and when glee clubs sang the merits of Harrison and the demerits of Van Buren. Coal oil had just been discovered and brought into use as an illuminant. Wide Awake clubs were organized in all the cities and towns of any size in the North. Their uniforms consisted of a cap, cape and torch and with banners flying and drums beating, blaring horns and flaring torches,

making the night luminous, presented an inspiring sight never before witnessed and one never to be forgotten.

The election resulted in Republican success. Abraham Lincoln was elected President November 6, 1860. This was followed November 7, 1860, as soon as the result was known, by a proclamation of South Carolina, calling a State convention on December 17 to take the State out of the Union and the formation of a confederacy of the slaveholding States. The action of South Carolina was followed by other Southern States, and on the 9th of February, 1861, a convention met in Montgomery, Alabama, for the purpose of forming a provisional government. Meantime a peace convention was called at the instance of conservative men from all parts of the country to meet in Washington, but nothing was accomplished though many propositions were advanced. Though Mr. Lincoln had not yet been inaugurated, nor had he announced any policy, the South, bent on war, kept on making every preparation for it. The navy was scattered to European ports and the forts, arsenals and munitions of war were quickly turned over by a complaisant secretary of the navy and of war, or left in such unprotected condition that they were easily seized. A state of hostility actually existed in South Carolina before the final blow was struck and Fort Sumter fired on and forced to surrender. In a day the North was ablaze. Party feeling was completely obliterated, and the people rushed to the defense of the government. War had actually begun.

War, terrible, ghastly war with all its attendant horrors had suddenly burst upon the nation. The guns of Fort Sumter had scarcely ceased their echo before men were rushing to the defense of the government at Washington. Excitement ran high. Farmers

"Left their plowshares in the furrow,"

men their business, mechanics their workshops, students their books and, shouldering musket and knap-sack, rushed to the front. It was in such times and admidst such excitement and surroundings, that the Women's Aid Society, of Lebanon,

sprang into existence—a society that gave to our little inland town an enviable reputation for generosity and patriotism, known from the rugged New England coast to the broad Savannahs of the middle west, that fed thousands and tens of thousands of soldiers on their way to the seat of war; that assisted to nurse them after battle; that supplied hospitals in the field and elsewhere with necessities and luxuries, and looked after the families of the men who were defending our homes and firesides.

On the 2nd of May, 1861, a public meeting was held in the court house, Hon. Wm. Rank presiding. The County Commissioners were requested to appropriate $10,000 for the purpose of maintaining the families of the volunteers during their necessary absence in the field. The appropriation was made, but the difficulty than arose of paying such certain sums weekly to each family as change suddenly became scarce. In a few weeks silver currency was entirely withdrawn from circulation and the postal currency was not then thought of, or if it was, had not been printed and put in circulation. National bank notes were not in existence. The only circulating medium was the notes of State banks, and many of these much below par. If you wished to pay a person fifty cents, you cut a dollar note in two, gave one half and retained the other, and smaller change was made with postage stamps.

Personal shinplasters were issued by Jacob Weidle, H. J. B. Smith and others, redeemable in sums of five dollars, and these circulated freely. With this condition confronting them, the County Commissioners, and those with whom they advised, called to their aid the women of the town and county and formed a relief committee, which took up the matter of distribution, and instead of paying out cash, which was not possible, gave orders on the butchers and grocers, thus relieving the situation and giving general satisfaction, the orders afterward being cashed in larger amounts. Out of this relief committee grew the organization, afterwards known as the "Women's Aid Society of Lebanon," which rendered such efficient aid to the Christian Commission, the Sanitary

Commission, to individual companies and regiments and, as I have already stated, fed tens of thousands of soldiers on their way to the war. The organization, as originally constituted, was as follows: Mrs. Jos. Karch, president; Mrs. Geo. Hoffman, vice president; Mrs. John George, treasurer; Miss Matilda Gloninger, later Mrs. John Wetherill, secretary; Miss Kate DeHuff, now Mrs. John Meily, assistant secretary. Such women as Mrs. Jacob B. Weidman, Mrs. Jacob Roedel, Mrs. Major Embich, Mrs. Martha J. Ross, Mrs. John W. Killinger, Mrs. Samuel B. Lehman, Mrs. Lorenzo Lehman, Mrs. Elizabeth Hay, Miss Jessie Roedel, Miss Margaret Roedel, Mrs. D. M. Karmany, Mrs. Christian Henry, Miss Ruthrauff, Miss Raber, Miss Lizzie Karch, Mrs. Eliza Goodman, Miss Sallie Lentz, Mrs. Eliza Marshall, Miss Anna B. George, Mrs. Samuel Kendell, Mrs. Julia B. Gloninger, Mrs. W. M. Guilford, Mrs. Jno. W. Mish, Mrs. Jno. W. Ulrich and many others, whom it is impossible to now name, helped to make up the organization and working force.

Later Mrs. Karch resigned the presidency and Mrs. Martha J. Ross was elected in her place, and on the death of Mrs. George, her daughter, Anna B. George, succeeded her, and both so remained until the end of the war and the work of the society was completed, turning over to a committee of soldiers, organized for the purpose of erecting a monument, some hundreds of dollars.

The first troops fed in passing through Lebanon was a company from Schuylkill county by some of the women of Lebanon, who hastily gathered food together. Under date of April 25, 1861, the "Courier" says: "About 500 soldiers from Schuylkill county passed through Lebanon on Sunday last on their way to Harrisburg. Some of the ladies, learning of their coming, gathered up a large supply of victuals and met them, the soldiers, at the depot with refreshments. They were delighted with the attention and some of them expressed a determination to come and live in Lebanon if they escaped the bullets of the traitors."

Capt. Elijah Lantz organized a company of soldiers and encamped on the fair grounds, then comprising a number of vacant lots of the Mifflin estate in the Fifth ward. The Women's Aid Society daily issued rations to the company for weeks until May 30, when he was ordered to Camp Curtin where the company was sworn into the service and became part of the Penna. Reserves Companies and regiments continued to pass through Lebanon and were fed by the society.

On June 27, 1861, Gov. Sprague, of Rhode Island, and one regiment of troops from his State passed through Lebanon and were entertained, and on the Saturday following 97 car loads of soldiers, consisting of the 2nd New Hampshire, the 28th New York and about 4,000 troops were fed at the station. "Since Friday last," says the "chronicler," "all these soldiers were met at the station and provided with food by the Aid Society."

On July 18 the "Courier" says, "More soldiers, the Reserved Penna. Volunteers, passed through here on Tuesday evening on the 'forward to the field of action.' They came from Camp Washington, Easton. The ladies of Lebanon, on short notice, provided a liberal supply of solid eatibles for them, which they greatly enjoyed and for which we were requested by one of the officers to return their sincerest thanks. They seemed to think that Lebanon is a 'bully place.' "

The ladies of Lebanon were able "on short notice" to provide. Indeed it was the previous preparation that enabled them to do this. After locating in various places, Mr. Kuhnle, of the Valley House, gave them the use of the southwest corner room in the basement of the hotel and here they kept a large store of provisions —bread by the load, hams by the hundred, boiled beef in quantity, butter by the firkin with other food in like proportion, and when the supply ran low, wagons were sent through the town and county and came back loaded, for to the credit of the people be it known, they were most liberal. The railroad company would telegraph when troops were expected to arrive, and then messengers—for we had no telephones then—would be dispatched to notify the

members of the society. Upon one occasion some women were on their way to church when a telegram was placed in their hands. They turned about, put on working dresses, and were ready when the troops came.

But let us again quote from our ever faithful "Chronicler." In July 25th it says, "The Third Penna. Reserves arrived in Lebanon on Tuesday afternoon on their way to Washington. They were served with refreshments while here," and again in August: "several regiments passed through here on their way to Washington, among them Fletcher Webster's regiment from Massachusetts."

Col. Webster was the son of Daniel Webster and was here several hours. Speeches were made by some of the officers and responded to by some of our prominent citizens.

Col. Webster was called on for a speech. His speech was laconic. He said, "I'm not a speech maker. I didn't come out to make speeches. I came out to fight. To hell with your speeches." A few months afterwards he fell in battle.

September 5, 1861, we find the following: "Cold weather will soon be coming on and the ladies are urged to form aid societies for knitting stockings, under clothing, &c. Our old Revolutionary mothers did this," and under date of September 29, "R. C. Hale, Quartermaster General, issued a call for stockings needed and urged wives and mothers to knit one or more pairs and to form associations for this purpose. A meeting was held in the court house and the following organization effected: President, Mrs. A. L. Ruthrauff, secretary, Miss Kate DeHuff, now Mrs. Meily; treasurer, Mrs. Geo. Hoffman. The town was divided as follows:

No. 1. N. W. Matilda Gloninger, Mrs. John Graeff.

No. 2. S. W. Miss Atkins, Mrs. Daniel Graeff.

No. 3. N. E. Mrs. Henry Hoffman, Mrs. Isaac Beckley.

No. 4. S. E. Mrs. Louisa Fisher Miss Lizzie Karch.

North. Mrs. Lizzie Bowman, Mrs. A. R. Boughter.

South. Miss Anna B. George, Miss Mary Guilford."

Says the "Courier." "No county in the State can boast of more patriotic ladies than Lebanon."

October 24 Capt. John Weidman's company was presented with a flag by ladies of Lebanon, one of them making the presentation speech, which was responded to by the captain. After a battle the women of Lebanon were particularly active gathering supplies and forwarding them to hospitals in the field and those places nearest the scene of action. Accordingly in the latter part of April, 1862, they sent a box to Cincinnati, containing delicacies for the sick and wounded from the battle of Pittsburg Landing, which had been fought a few weeks before and it brought the following letter from Dr. Greenawalt: "Your letter came to hand in due time, followed by the box from the Ladies' Aid Society of Lebanon. It was gratefully received and is being faithfully applied to the wounded and sick brought from the battle at Pittsburg Landing. It would gladden your hearts to see the immense number forwarded to this place and provided for through the kindness of our charitably disposed citizens." Learning that quite a number of men from the 93rd regiment—Lebanon county's own regiment—were now in a Philadelphia hospital, the Women's Aid Society shipped July 3, 1863, two boxes to them, containing 7 bed spreads, one quilt, one dozen flannel shirts, four pair cushions, 100 yards of bandage, two feather pillows, two pillow slips, thirteen sheets, twenty pairs drawers, twenty-eight towels, twenty handkerchiefs, lint, two bundles linen, seven pounds dried apples, three pounds dried cherries, two papers farina, applebutter, jellies, preserved fruits, &c., &c. Another box, it was expected, would follow in a week or two and the public were requested to send in supplies. The matron of the Wood Street U. S. army hospital returned, at this time, their sincere thanks for a previous liberal donation received through Dr. Gloninger. That their charity knew only necessity and not class or creed, is evidenced from the fact that the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's hospital very gratefully acknowledged the receipt of a box containing various articles from the Ladies Aid Society of Lebanon. About

this time Dr. Simonton, Surgeon of the 93rd, acknowledged the receipt of two boxes of articles to eat and to wear, and Dr. Stewart, of Philadelphia, received the boxes which, he says, "were forwarded to Baltimore, where they were in need of just such articles." To give you some idea of the work done by the society, I give you the following, as shipped to various points in one month—from October 3 to November 6, 1862:

Oct.	3.	Col. McCarter's regiment,	4,766 lbs.
"	8.	To Philadelphia,	936 "
"	10.	" "	3,895 "
"	11.	" "	1,220 "
"	14.	" "	2,295 "
"	24.	" "	1,255 "
"	24.	" Baltimore,	2,585 "
"	25.	" Harrisburg,	70 "
Nov.	6.	" York,	1,543 "
			18,555 lbs.

Following the battle of Gettysburg the society was exceedingly busy collecting and forwarding supplies to the hospitals near the battlefield, and in a few hours collected, in addition, $230 from the citizens.

When the soldiers, during the winter months were suffering from scurvy and onions were asked for, the society collected and sent away two four-wheeled cars filled with onions.

This gives you but a faint idea of the work of the women of the Aid Society of Lebanon. They were "instant in season and out of season," ministering to the men who were fighting the battles of the Union, and what with household cares and families demanding attention, you can imagine they were exceedingly busy women. It mattered not when the call came they were quick to respond to every command of duty.

One of the surviving members of the 93rd regiment recently stated that whenever their command mingled with troops from the eastern States and it was learned they were

from Lebanon, the town was always spoken of with enthusiasm, for they remembered the treatment they received from the Women's Aid Society.

In October, 1884, twenty-five years afters the close of hostilities, when passion had cooled and men grown conservative with passing years, the 93rd regimental organization, in grateful recognition of the services of the Women's Aid Society of Lebanon, elected the surviving members of the society honorary members of the Regimental Association, as the following certificate attests:

HEADQUARTERS

LEBANON, PA.

This certifies that at a Reunion of the Regiment, held on the 30th day of October, 1884, at Gettysburg, Pa.,

MRS. GEORGE ROSS

was duly elected to Honorary Membership in said Association.

HENRY C. GRITTINGER,
President.
EDWARD C. EUSTON,
Recording Secretary
[SEAL] GEO. H UHLER,
Corresponding Secretary.

The women who were thus honored, as we learn from the records of the organization, are the following: Mrs. Jos. Karch, Mrs. Matilda M. Wetherill, Mrs. Geo. Hoffman, Mrs. Jacob B. Weidman, Mrs. E. R. Hay, Mrs. Christian Henry, Miss Ruthrauff, Miss Sarah Raber, Miss Elizabeth Karch, Mrs. Eliza Goodman, Miss Sarah Lentz, Mrs. Eliza Marshall, Mrs. Geo. Ross, Miss Annie B. George, Miss Jessie Roedel, Mrs. Samuel P. Kendal, Mrs. S. B. Lehman, Mrs. Lorenza Lehman.

As a still further appreciation of their work during the War of the Rebellion, in January, 1885, the regimental organization sent to each member of the Aid Society the following:

HEADQUARTERS NINETY-THIRD REGIMENT
PENNA. STATE VOL. ASSOCIATION.

LEBANON, PA., June 10, 1885.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Association held this day it was Resolved, That the survivors of the 93d Reg. Pa. Volunteers still cherish a warm regard for the Ladies' Aid Association of 1861, which furnished many comforts for the men of the Regiment while at Camp Coleman, and that their names be subscribed on the minute book book of the Association.

Resolved, That a copy of the foregoing resolutions, attested by the officers of the Association, be furnished to each of the ladies still surviving with a certificate of Honorary Membership.

HENRY C. GRITTINGER,
President.
EDWARD C. EUSTON,
Recording Secretary.
GEORGE H. UHLER,
Corresponding Secretary.

Such, poorly told, was the work of the Women's Aid Society, during one of the greatest wars of the ages.

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